DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 931 CS 508 368

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TITLE A Semiotic Interpretation of the Teaching of Business Communication in Today's Global Economical Trend.
PUB DATE Oct 93
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Business Communication (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, October 27-30, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Education; *Global Approach; Higher Education; Information Literacy; International Communication; Language Role; Linguistics; *Semiotics; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Context; Drucker (Peter F); Freire (Paulo)

ABSTRACT

The theoretical and educational perspective presented in this paper offers a foundation for the way in which communication becomes a tool to promote social economic expansion and awareness of multiple international cultural realities. Part I examines the philosophies of Paulo Freire and Peter Drucker which provide the core of the paper. Part II defines communication as a semiotic language device, one among other systems with which the individual participates to organize, conceptualize, and change history. In Part III the role of communication in international business is examined as it provides a tool to clear the way toward bringing peoples' views together. Part IV describes traditional parameters of language beliefs, comparing them to a more progressive semiotic/psycholinguistic parameter. The five main language parameters are described under the following headings: (1) physiological; (2) the nature versus nurture controversy; (3) the concept of equilibrium; (4) the constructivist versus the creative; and (5) the concept of history. In Part V, 7 general and 15 specific objectives are recommended for business communications educators to integrate and/or develop into communication courses. Contains 10 references. (NH)

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ED 362 931

"A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN TODAY'S GLOBAL ECONOMICAL TREND"

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A SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION
OF THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION
IN TODAY'S GLOBAL ECONOMICAL TREND

PART I: THE PHILOSOPHIES OF PAULO FREIRE AND PETER DRUCKER

Paulo Freire's theory on literacy and Peter Drucker's view of today's global economical trend are the core of this paper.

The concepts that emerge from their philosophies are: (1) that the individual constructs and creates his/her own sense of reality through the internalization of signs and symbols in the environment (Freire, 1973); and (2) that in order to bring about social and economical change, the individual must be able to question and expand his/her belief systems by perceiving multiple social/economical realities and the possibility for alternative forms of reality (Drucker,1991).

The development of literacy as a communication tool is presented by Freire as a critical device in both the emergence of a nation and the unfolding of an individual consciousness. For a nation, literacy represents the key to social and economic growth, the means of achieving parity in a community of nations, and the source ultimately, of a global, rather than merely a provincial, consciousness. For an individual, literacy is the vehicle that permits the full flowering of one's development, the entree to an expansive awareness of the world, and the basis of one's contribution to society.

Peter Drucker's view on the issue of today's global and international world presents what ought to be the mision of

education in business schools. He envisions a need for an "ability to present ideas orally and in writing; the ability to work with people; the ability to shape and direct one's own work, contribution and career" (p. 5). Furthermore he acknowledges that a business has to have leadership positions worldwide. To attain these leadership positions it has to be able to do research, to design, to develop, to engineer and to manufacture in various parts of the world. It has to go international.

Both philosophies relay on one basic truth: they cultivate a sense of the need for effective language strategies. Through communication, one can gain a profound awareness of the divergent economical and social realities that exist. Their perception of the individual as a creator of economical and social changes rest on their ontological view of individuals as creators of history. The use of communication as a tool to engage in social economical historical change; and in transactions which lead to leadership positions in international endeavors delineates communication as a semiotic language device.

PART II: COMMUNICATION AS A SEMIOTIC LANGUAGE DEVICE

The essence of communication from a semiotic perspective is the word. The word is perceived as consisting of two main components -- refection and action (praxis). One cannot exist without the other. Action without reflection can only bring fourth "activism" and, on the other hand, reflection without action leads only to verbalism. In this union of action and

reflection, the individual is continually redefining his/her environment (Freire, 1973).

Communication in this context encompasses the elements of language and the language processes, the time and space in which it occurs, and the actions which result from that process.

The process of communication envisioned from a semiotic perspective encompass multiple instances of transactions, which lead the individual to form his/her perception of reality. This process is akin to what one might call "reading the world". The individual learns to mean through his/her natural meaning potential and thus engages naturally in the process of communication.

A summary of this perspective can be presented in the following three comprehensive language premises:

- Language is a social sign system, a semiotic device. It is one among other sign systems with which the individual actively participates in a signification process to organize, conceptualize, and change history.
- The potential for developing flexibility in language (i.e., different communication systems) comes into being as the individual transacts with multiple realities.
- Different aspects of meaning come into play through the transactive nature of multiple realities. Meaning and action form the praxis for the infinite evolution of the creation of history.

Communication is not only the individual's most significant tool for understanding his/her world, but it is also the catalyst for transforming it. It is the source of his/her comprehension of the underlying unity of all realities.

PART III: COMMUNICATION AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Peter Drucker in his view of global and international business describes the importance of integrating technology, global markets, instant communications and competitiveness.

He views human and technological competitiveness as an essential aspect of global and international economical growth. Within the spheres of competitiveness Drucker points to communication as an essential component of international affairs.

Drucker envisions communication as the integrating tool which will enable the business person to function within international endeavors. Communication can help smooth missunderstandings. Using it adequately and in structured ways it can clear the way toward bringing peoples' view together.

The perception of reality by the communicators embedded in international transactions must relay on interactive schemata of multiple knowledge about the various components of international cultural structures such as: culture, language, education, religion, values, social organization, technology, political and/or legal environment, and economical systems.

From a semiotic perspective instances of multiple realities endowed in the components of cultural diversity transact with the

functions and processes of language. As a result the individual creates new meaning, new phenomenon, new language, and new historical imprint.

PART IV: THE SEMIOTICS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Communication as a semiotic device and international business concepts create a new cohesion in the act of learning to mean. This cohesion will be presented by the author through five main language beliefs. The author will describe traditional parameters of language beliefs comparing it to a more progressive semiotic/psycholinguistic parameter.

A. Physiological

1. Behaviorist--refers to the organism's muscular or glandular response to stimuli; this, in turn, allows for associations between external stimuli and physiological processes.

2. Constructivist--the cortex, with its connection to reticular formation, is where memory is stored. This allows for the accumulation of data that can be used in future experiences.

3. Semiotic/Psycholinguistic--the nervous system transacts with the outer world. This involves the individual's perception (i.e., the use of different senses--

which utilizes anticipatory schemata). This, in turn, elicits schema itself that is used to interpret a given phenomenon. It is an ongoing, social process.

B. The Nature vs. Nurture Controversy

The nature vs. nurture controversy is a point of differentiation between these two schools of thought:

1. The traditional view is that the individual has been conditioned either by heredity (developmental), by environment (behaviorist) or by both heredity and environment (structuralist).

2. The semiotic/psycholinguistic perspective, on the other hand, is founded on the belief that the individual is a thinking being, free, involved in the process of unconditioned perception. When the individual engages in thought he transcends the immediately practical or the physical world that surrounds him/her. This, of course, is rooted in the individual's social transactions with the world of experience.

C. The Concept of Equilibrium

The three concepts of equilibrium are:

1. The Behaviorist--the organism achieves equilibrium through stimulus-response situations and conditioned reflexes.

2. The Constructivist: the development of cognitive structures are viewed, form a biological/physiological

perspective, as a means of fulfilling the individual's need for adaptation and thus for equilibrium.

3. The Semiotic/Psycholinguistic--equilibrium is sought through a need to understand; this is based on the premise that the individual is a reflective being with a need to both understand and probe the nature of his/her environment.

D. The Constructivist vs. the Creative

The constructive vs. the creative (i.e., semiotic/psycholinguistic) perspective:

1. From a constructivist perspective, the organism creates certain mental constructs for interpreting the environment. The reason for this is his inherent need to maintain equilibrium through an open system that resists change. Throughout this process, he/she mentally reconstructs the phenomenological world; thus he/she "extends" (or manipulates) his/her environment in order to satisfy his/her biological needs and to maintain the organism's structure.

2. From a semiotic psycholinguistic perspective, on the other hand, the individual's open system undergoes changes (in contrast to the stage of equilibrium stressed in the constructivist perspective). As the individual transacts with signs and symbols, he/she is in a state of constant evolution.

E. The Concept of History

1. From a constructivist and historical perspective, the individual engages in the process of reconstructing a given reality according to his/her mental constructs. The individual inherits a given reality encompassing certain cultural/social mores which he/she is expected to follow.

2. From a semiotic/psycholinguistic perspective, the individual is an ahistorical being without a pre-determined being. This means that he/she is capable of reflecting upon his/her reality and changing and creating history.

A semiotic/psycholinguistic perspective insightfully acknowledges that the individual's cognitive interaction with the world inevitably implies a social and intellectual consciousness that forms the basis for the enrichment and creation of new phenomena (Halliday, 1978; Luria, 1981; Merlau-Ponty, 1945; Neisser, 1978; Vygotsky, 1936). Language becomes the individual's means of interpreting and organizing signs, thereby forming new transactions. It becomes the means of engaging in an ongoing process of reflection, a tool for exploring multiple realities, the essential instrument for communicating internationally.

The overall perspective is that alternative approaches to reality will be perceived, considered, sharpened, and deepened as the individual engages in international communication processes.

The following language premises underline the basic core between communication as a semiotic device and international business concepts:

1. The construction of reality by the individual is based on the building of meaning through the integration of perceptions, interpretations, and multiple contexts (realities).
2. Language growth occurs through the social event of learning to mean in different situations.
3. On the other hand, learning to mean, to conceptualize thought and express it through communicative forms (both verbal and nonverbal) elicits multilingual flexibility.
4. Contextual communication thought processes elicits an in-depth organization of language patterns.
5. The integration of all aspects of the individual's world suggests that the individual is part of the ongoing flux of multicultural experiences.
6. Thus, the individual him/herself may also be seen as a sign -- one that is not static, but rather evolves constanly as he/she transacts with the environment.
7. In this way, through the transactional process involving thoughts, ideas, symbols, and context the

evolutionary process of history -- and of individual, national, and international growth is manifested.

This perspective provides an integrated view of language teaching in contextual multicultural business domains. Language comes to mean in contextual multicultural business transaction.

The objectives and strategies used in the teaching of business communication courses must lead to a more global and/or international vision of concept formation.

PART V: IMPLICATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL/MULTICULTURAL CONCEPTS IN THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COURSES

With the previous discussion as prelude, the author recommends business communication educators to integrate and/or develop courses based on international business communication objectives. The following objectives have been inspired and adapted from the course "Pluralism in American Education" (Bennett, 1980):

A. General Objectives

1. To identify factors that characterize effective communication strategies and business transactions from the perspective of different cultural groups.
2. To describe how social forces shape individual identities, nations, values, and business transactions.

3. To identify different verbal and nonverbal transactions that characterize different ethnic groups.
4. To recognize and describe miscommunication situations in business transactions due to cultural biases.
5. To define and evaluate communication models and strategies used in multicultural/international business settings.
6. To explain different aspects of culture such as: education, religion, values; and their impact on human communication and business transactions.
7. To describe business communication issues as they relate to the social organization structure of different multicultural/international cultural groups in terms of technology, social organization, political environment, legal aspects, environmental issues, and economical structures.

B. Specific Objectives

1. Practice developing communication strategies for multicultural/international settings.
2. Learn about individual and national differences that affect business development, growth, and achievement.

3. Distinguish among the concepts of macro and micro culture within diverse nations from a business perspective.
4. Learn about the origins of cultural diversity in our society and other nations and their economical evolution.
5. Gain greater insight into personal and ethnic characteristics, as well as a sense of ethnic identity, and consider how these may influence business transactions.
6. Realize that the more one knows about cultural differences the more likely it is to avoid misunderstandings and confrontation in business transactions.
7. Define a number of key concepts in the field of multicultural/international business communication strategies.
8. Learn how to use appropiate multicultural/international interview techniques.
9. Identify the concept of ethnicity as another individual difference that can influence business communication and transactions.
10. Examine one's own sense of ethnic identity and how it may have influenced communication.

13. Identify concepts and themes in selected novels which relate to multicultural themes and examine their impact on social economical structures.

14. Develop business communication strategies while working with ethnically diverse communities.

PART VI: CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This theoretical and educational perspective provides the individual with the means of engaging in multiple realities. Concept formation in multicultural and international business communication processes become the individual's means of interpreting and organizing signs, thereby forming new transactions. It becomes the means of engaging in an ongoing process of reflection and the vehicle for changing social and historical structures. It offers a valuable foundation for the entire way in which communication becomes a tool to promote social economical expansion and an awareness of multiple international cultural realities.

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